

CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE UPDATE

July 22, 2002

The Center for Disease Control has issued a new statement reference CWD and possible human infection: "Although it is generally prudent to avoid consuming food derived from any animal with evidence of a TSE, **to date, there is no evidence that CWD has been transmitted or can be transmitted to humans under natural conditions.** However, there is not yet strong evidence that such transmissions could not occur. To further assess the possibility that the CWD agent might occasionally cause disease in humans, additional epidemiologic and laboratory studies could be helpful, including molecular characterization and strain typing of the agents causing CWD in deer and elk and CJD in potentially exposed patients. Ongoing national surveillance for CJD and other neurological cases will remain important for continuing to assess the risk, if any, of CWD transmission to humans."

The CWD National Plan has been released. This plan was developed by numerous federal and state biologist in a four week time period in response to the Congressional hearing held in mid-May. This plan calls for the U. S. Department of Agriculture and the U. S. Department of Interior to assist the states in addressing the CWD problem. A funding package to provide much needed funding assistance to the states will be going to Congress this week also. A multi agency team has been selected to develop an implementation plan for the National CWD Plan. This team consists of three representatives from the U. S. Department of Agriculture, three from the U. S. Department of Interior and three from state wildlife agencies. Bruce Morrison of Nebraska has been named co-chair along with Michael Gilsdorf of the Department of Agriculture.

The Wisconsin DNR has released computer modeling work conducted by the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Their model indicates that the deer herd in south central Wisconsin will be gone in 20 years if the spread of CWD is not controlled. This is quicker than the 50-75 years indicated by Colorado DOW modeling due to the much higher density of deer in Wisconsin (Wisconsin 75-100 deer per square mile vs Colorado at 10-25 deer per square mile).

During the week of July 15th, visits were made to the staff of each of Nebraska's congressional delegation to update them on the Chronic Wasting Disease situation in Nebraska and elsewhere. All staff were interested and appreciative of the information.

On July 17th a presentation was made to the Congressional Sportsmen Caucus on CWD in North American. Approximately 35 people were in attendance, 15 members of congress and 20 staffers.

Also on July 17th, a presentation on CWD in North America was made to the combined representatives of several conservation oriented non-profit organizations in Washington. The National Shooting Sports Foundation, Whitetails Unlimited, Safari Club International and the Archery Manufacturers and Merchants Organization all pledged to make grant funds available for CWD management and research. The Congressional Sportsmen Foundation volunteered to be the clearing house for information on grant availability and to also work with all other non-profits to organize an information exchange data base for non-profits.

The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources has announced plans to test approximately 1,000 deer for CWD this fall. This brings the known testing throughout North America to

approximately 150,000 animals. The USDA-APHIS is working to bring at least 5 more labs on line to test for CWD by this fall, giving a total of 11 labs accredited for CWD testing. Lab selection is being conducted by a multi-agency team from the federal government and state wildlife agencies. Nebraska is represented on this selection team by Bruce Morrison of the Wildlife Division.

Three Wisconsin men have died from brain disease since 1990. All three men participated in an annual wild game feed at the cabin of one of the men. The wild game came from all over the United States and Canada, including the CWD endemic area of Colorado. Two of the men died from CJD and one from Pick's disease, another brain disease not related to TSE. It is estimated that over 100 men have participated in this wild game feed over the years. Although some people are pointing to CWD as the causative agent, no evidence of such has been found. The press and those who feel that CWD is a danger to humans will surely have a field day with these incidents. Several prominent doctors have stated that it appears that there is epidemic of diagnosis, not necessarily an epidemic of disease, resulting in an epidemic of fear without reason. They also stated that the sad truth is that panic has far outrun science, and the lack of evidence does not help the panic. There is no pathological confirmation of a link between CWD and human health concerns, only speculation.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Saskatchewan have filed 17 counts of fraud on a ex director of the Saskatchewan Elk Breeders Association charging him with theft and trafficking of public wildlife. This charge includes allegations that the individual captured wild cervids and placed them in his captive facility. A statement from RCMP said that this investigation raises questions about the reliability of record keeping in the game farming industry.